



कठोपनिषत्
Katopanishad
Section 2
Volume 9

अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः । दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति मूढाः अन्धेनैव नीयमानाः यथान्धाः ॥	2 - 5
न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति बालं प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोहेन मूढम् । अयं लोकः नास्ति परः इति मानि पुनः पुनः वशं आपद्यते मे ॥	2 - 6
श्रवणायापि बहुभिः यो न लभ्यः शृण्वन्तोऽपि बहवः यं न विद्युः । आश्वर्यो ज्ञाता कुशलोऽस्य लब्धा आश्वर्यो ज्ञाता कुशलानुशिष्टः ॥	2 - 7

As we may recall, Lord यम identifies प्रेयस् - pursuit of transient happiness such as exclusive pursuits of ephemeral wealth, power and pleasure as अविद्या - self-ignorance or spiritual blindness, and श्रेयस् -pursuit of मोक्ष - total fulfillment in Life, pursuit of आत्म ज्ञानं - Self Knowledge as विद्या - spiritual illumination.

Therefore, प्रेयस् is अविद्या and श्रेयस् is विद्या.

While अविद्या and विद्या are both open to every person at all times, most people in the world are exclusively governed by अविद्या only - spiritual ignorance only. Referring to such अविद्या and its effect on people, Lord यम says:

अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः । दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति मूढाः अन्धेनैव नीयमानाः यथान्धाः ॥	2 - 5
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अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः

अन्तरे means मध्ये - in the midst of
अविद्यायां means अविद्या कार्यायां - the effects of अविद्या - the effects of spiritual blindness which are identifying oneself with one's body-mind-intellect complex and its attributes, and living a life governed by अहंकार - ego "I" and मम बुद्धि "My" notions.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Such people think "I am the कर्ता, I am the भोक्ता - I am the doer, I am the enjoyer with notions such as My possessions, My power, My glory, etc. Therefore

अविद्यायां अन्तरे वर्तमानाः - means living in the midst of such spiritual ignorance, such अहंकार, मम कार बुद्धि, a बुद्धि filled with egoistic "I" and मम My notions, covered by and encircled by-longings and cravings for various objects of desire and expectations in life

स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः - They look upon themselves as पण्डिताः and hence धीराः. They think that they have expert knowledge and scholarship in their chosen fields of activities (पण्डिताः) and therefore, they are people of wisdom, and they are धीराः, they have all the wisdom there is.

दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति मूढाः

मूढाः - Such people are really मूढाः - deluded people

अविवेकिनः - Their delusion is caused by अविद्या - self-ignorance, together with their superimposed notions of scholarship and wisdom, which makes them really foolish. Being so, what do they do?

दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति

परियन्ति - They go round and round in the world of their own perceptions.

दन्द्रम्यमाणाः - staggering to and fro in very many crooked steps. How?

यथा अन्धाः अन्धेन एव नीयमानाः - Just as many blind people, being led by the blind, move on an uneven road

अविद्या or spiritual blindness is characterized by the absence of discrimination, with or without learning or scholarship. If it is with learning and/or scholarship, it becomes even more regrettable. Because, mere learning and/or scholarship without spiritual illumination only makes for greater pride and vanity, resulting in increased spiritual blindness. This is childish foolishness, says Lord यम in the next verse. It is only learned ignorance. Living in the midst of such ignorance, one yet considers oneself as wise

(धीरः). He is full of life and activity, but it is all दन्द्रम्यमाणाः - faltering activity in unsteady steps with a clouded mind. Lord यम compares the activities of such a person to those of a blind man leading another blind man, with both falling into the ditch.

What does such मूढत्वं born of अविद्या - foolishness born of spiritual blindness do to a person? Such a person progressively becomes so much infatuated by the lure of



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

वित्त मोह - delusion caused by exclusive pursuits of transient, pleasure, profit and power in this world, that he soon loses his ability even to discriminate between **धर्म** and **अधर्म** - what is proper and what is improper, in one's worldly pursuits.

Formerly, because of **अविद्या**, he had no **नित्य-अनित्य विवेक**. Now his **मूढत्व** - his foolishness is so complete that he not only has no **नित्य-अनित्य विवेक**, he also has no **धर्म-अधर्म विवेक**, **पाप-पुण्य विवेक** consciousness also. He does not hesitate to do anything to satisfy his fancies in the pursuits of his never-ending objects of desire.

For a person who has no **धर्म-अधर्म** consciousness, **पुण्य-पाप** consciousness, there is no such thing as life after death. The very thought of following **धर्म**, accumulating **पुण्य**, so that one can go to heaven (**स्वर्ग लोकोरसांपराय**) after death, never occurs in his mind and **बुद्धि**. He firmly believes that pursuits other than those of pleasure, profit and power in this world are simply illusory. Being so much absorbed in such worldly pursuits, he cannot see anything beyond. Therefore, about such a **मूढ** - such a foolish person, Lord **यम** says

न साम्परायः प्रतिभति बालं, प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोहेन मूढम् ।
अयं लोकः नास्ति परः इति मानी, पुनः पुनः वशं आपद्यते मे ॥

2 - 6

Being a **ज्ञानी** himself, Lord **यम** calls a **मूढ** - an utterly foolish person described above as a **बाल**, a person of childish maturity, because nobody needs to be a **मूढ** for ever, since the path of **श्रेयस्** - the path of **विद्या** - the path of spiritual enlightenment is open to every person at all times. In the present context, however, Lord **यम** continues his description of a **मूढ**, who is utterly foolish, who does not have even **धर्म-अधर्म** or **पुण्य-पाप** consciousness. Lord **यम** says:

बालं मूढं - To such a person of childish maturity

वित्त मोहेन मूढं - To such a spiritually ignorant person who is so much infatuated by the lure of transient pleasures, profits and powers available in this world

प्रमाद्यन्तं मूढं - who is completely indifferent to his life after death, because of his incapacity to distinguish between **पुण्य कर्म**s and **पाप कर्म**s



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ब्रह्मचिद्या **Brahma Vidya**

साम्परायः न प्रतिभाति - even the thought of following धर्म and accumulating पुण्य for going to heaven - स्वर्ग लोक a better world after death, even such a thought does not occur in the mind and बुद्धि of such a मूढ.

सांपरायः means स्वर्ग लोक - reaching heaven as a result of पुण्य कर्म

What does a मूढ think?

अयं लोकः meaning अयं एव लोकः अस्ति. This world alone exists. This world, which is perceptible to one's senses and which is endowed with varieties of enjoyments and opportunities for enjoyments, such world alone exists

नास्ति परः - परः लोकः न अस्ति Other than this world, another world does not exist.

There is no अदृष्ट लोक - invisible world such as heaven, etc. anywhere

इति मानी - The one who thinks like that, which means a मूढः

पुनः पुनः मे वशं आपद्यते - falls into my control, falls into the clutches of death again and again, which means that that person is born again and again, only to die again and again. Such is the lot of most people in the world.

Let us briefly recall here the words of Sri Krishna on मूढाः - those who cannot even distinguish between धर्म and अधर्म - what is proper and what is improper in their daily activities.

आसुरीं योनिमापन्नाः मूढाः जन्मनि जन्मनि ।

मां अप्राप्य कौन्तेय ततो यान्ति अधमां गतिम् ॥

G 16-20

आसुरीं योनिं आपन्नाः - Having been born and brought up in the society and company of people governed by personal qualities which are totally detrimental to one's spiritual awareness

मूढाः जन्मनि जन्मनि - they remain मूढाः - they remain foolish, infatuated, confused and spiritually ignorant without ever cultivating their faculty of discrimination and proper judgment. They remain as such मूढाः, birth after birth, life after life.

Having not gained सन् मार्गं चित्तेक - the good sense, life after life, they accumulate पाप and दुःख for themselves. Consequently तमस् गुण remains dominating their mind and बुद्धि - life after life. Finally what happens to them? कौन्तेय - O! Arjuna, please listen.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

मां अप्राप्य एव - Never gaining ME, never reaching ME – The परमेश्वर – never recognizing the Divine SELF in themselves

ततः यान्ति अधमां गतिं - they, then, go to take up lower and lower births. They never get an opportunity to uplift themselves. Having not gained सन् मार्ग विवेक – the good sense – the common sense to follow the path of धर्म and God-Consciousness, they push themselves downward, into lower and lower wombs, births and lives. So says Sri Krishna.

That is also the content of Lord यम's message in the last two verses. Lord यम tells Nachiketa: "While most people in the world seem pushed into the pursuit of प्रेयस् – seeking only transient pleasures of worldly life, among the many thousands of such people, only a few like you have the wisdom to choose the pursuit of श्रेयस् – seeking आत्म ज्ञान – Self-Knowledge, which is Total Fulfillment in Life. Further:

श्रवणायापिबहुभिः यो न लभ्यः
शृण्वन्तोऽपि बहवः यं न विध्युः ।
आश्चर्यो वक्ता कुशलोऽस्य लब्धा
आश्चर्यो ज्ञाता कुशलानु शिष्टः ॥

2 - 7

श्रवणाय अपि बहुभिः यः न लभ्यः

श्रवणाय अपि – Even for listening

बहुभिः – for many people

यः (श्रेयः) न लभ्यः - That which is श्रेयस् – आत्म ज्ञान – Self-Knowledge, is not available. Many people do not even get an opportunity to listen about श्रेयस् – about आत्म ज्ञान.

Even to get an exposure to Self-Knowledge – even to listen to a discourse on आत्म ज्ञान is very difficult for many people, because they are not yet ready for that kind of knowledge, and therefore they have no inclination to listen to such knowledge.

We must recall Sri Krishna's words here:

मनुष्याणां सहस्रैषु कश्चित् यतति सिद्धये । यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चित् मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

Among the many thousands of people, only some one person makes the necessary efforts for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं ; and even among the thousands of people who make the necessary efforts to gain आत्म ज्ञानं, only some one person succeeds in gaining knowledge about ME – The परमेश्वर.

Here also, Lord यम says the same thing:

शृण्वन्तः अपि बहवः यं न विध्युः

शृण्वन्तः अपि – Even among those who have had the opportunity to listen to a Discourse on आत्म ज्ञानं – Self-Knowledge,

बहवः यं (आत्म ज्ञानं) न विध्युः (न विदन्ति) – many people do not understand that knowledge about आत्मा because they do not have संस्कृत बुद्धि, which means they do not have prior discipline of enquiring and analysis leading to clarity of understanding and vision. Their अंतः करण – mind and बुद्धि – is not mature and purified enough to grasp आत्म ज्ञानं – Knowledge of आत्मा – The SELF. They would never know what आत्मा is, because, आत्मा is not available as an object of knowledge.

Now, if I cannot understand श्रवणं even after listening to a Discourse on आत्म ज्ञानं, then what is the use of listening, what is the use of श्रवणं ? The answer is, even if a person listens to a Discourse on श्रेयस् – श्रवणं – ब्रह्म विद्या – just once, even that is good for the person; because, even though such listening may not result in recognition of आत्मा in oneself immediately, it does create in him a संस्कार – a वृत्ति – a disposition, towards such knowledge. Why? Because, it is knowledge about one's own self - which will make that person love to go for such listening again and again.

Every such संस्कार– mental disposition for such listening – leads to further inquiry on the subject, by one's own self, which serves to protect oneself from further dissipation in life. That is why Sri Krishna says:

न हि कल्याणकृत् कश्चित् दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति ॥ (G 6 – 40)

Any person who has taken a small step, in the direction of listening to a discourse on ब्रह्म विद्या – आत्म ज्ञानं – Self Knowledge, that person is a कल्याणकृत् – that person has taken the most *auspicious first step* – the highest service one can do to oneself, to uplift oneself from any further degradation in life. Even if that person does not gain आत्म ज्ञानं, does not reach the goal of मोक्ष in one's present life time, even after listening to



ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

ब्रह्म विद्या Knowledge again and again, still that person stands to gain enormously in his future lives, because, Sri Krishna assures:

प्राप्य पुण्यकृतां लोकान् उषित्वा शाश्वतीः समाः
शुचीनां श्रीमतां गेहे योगभ्रष्टोऽभिजायते ॥

अथवा योगिनामेव कुले भवति धीमतां । (G 6 - 42)
तत्र तं बुद्धि संयोगं लभते पौर्वदेहिकम् ॥ (G 6 - 43)

He will be born in a family where there is prosperity and culture with plenty of opportunities for listening and learning ब्रह्म विद्या, or, he will be born to parents who are already enlightened. In his new life, he gains connection with whatever he had gained in his past births, and with such head-start, he makes a renewed effort for gaining मोक्ष.

There is never any bad lot, or degradation for such a person, which means that श्रवणं – listening to ब्रह्म विद्या Knowledge Itself is a great blessing in life. It is itself a पुण्य कर्म, and it is the starting point for continued happiness, born of material and spiritual progress. Sri Krishna says that also in ch.18 of भगवत् गीता.

To listen to ब्रह्म विद्या –knowledge, one needs a Teacher (a वक्ता) to listen to. There are teachers for various kinds of knowledge, but all of them cannot teach ब्रह्म विद्या. The मुण्डक उपनिषत् says that the Teacher for ब्रह्म विद्या should be both श्रोत्रियं and ब्रह्मनिष्ठं – he should be both learned in Upanishad Knowledge and well qualified to teach, and he must also already be a Realized knower of ब्रह्मन् – he must already be a ज्ञानी himself. Such teachers are rare, and the availability of such a teacher at any particular time and place is always a Wonder. Likewise, not all students of Knowledge of various kinds are also students of ब्रह्म विद्या Knowledge.

To be successful as a Student of ब्रह्म विद्या Knowledge, one must have all the four-fold qualifications (साधनचतुष्टयं) that we talked about earlier. Such students of ब्रह्म विद्या Knowledge are rare, and to find such a qualified student seeking आत्मज्ञानं – Self – Knowledge at any particular time and place is always a wonder.

Only when contact is established between a qualified teacher and a qualified student, **spiritual Illumination** takes place – which is Itself a wonder. Therefore, Lord यमस्यः

आश्रय्यो वक्ता कुशलोऽस्य लब्धा



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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

आश्चर्यो ज्ञाता कुशलानु शिष्टः ॥

अस्य (आत्मज्ञानस्य) चक्ता आश्चर्यः - **wonder – extraordinary – rare**, indeed is a चक्ता – teacher of ब्रह्म विद्या – आत्मज्ञानं – Self Knowledge. Likewise, अस्य (आत्मज्ञानस्य) लब्धा कुशलः - the gainer of आत्मज्ञानं is indeed a कुशलः, meaning निपुणः - one who is extraordinarily capable in मननं and निदि ध्यासनं— reflection, analysis and absorption of Upanishadic Knowledge. Similarly, आश्चर्यः ज्ञाता कुशलानु शिष्टः - **wonder – extraordinary – rare**, indeed is a ज्ञाता – the one who becomes the Knower of ब्रह्मन् – who becomes a ज्ञानी— कुशलानु शिष्टः – being instructed by a qualified teacher who is Himself a ज्ञानी.

Wonderful and extraordinary are the teacher of ब्रह्म विद्या the student of ब्रह्म विद्या and the result of such teacher-student contact, says Lord यम.

In the next verse, Lord यम emphasizes the need for a competent teacher for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं – Self-Knowledge which we will see next time.



ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

A question has been raised as to why we refer to भगवत् गीता verses frequently while reading the कठोपनिषत् verses. The primary reason is simply to call attention to the identity of the messages involved. In all the Upanishads, including the भगवत् गीता, the source and content of the messages involved are one and the same, namely, परमेश्वर Itself. The source is परमेश्वर and the content is परमेश्वर.

All words of all the Upanishads are ब्रह्मणो मुखं – they arise from परमेश्वर only. That परमेश्वर is already in oneself. The only way for anyone to be able to recognize That परमेश्वर in oneself is through the content of the words of the Upanishads and the भगवत् गीता. This fact needs to be recognized.

In terms of the methods of communication of the messages involved, the Upanishads and the भगवत् गीता are both complementary as well as supplementary to every one seeking ईश्वर ज्ञानं – Self Knowledge. Our overriding mission here is to bring the message of the भगवत् गीता in its entirety within the reach of every interested person in our Temple community. The six Upanishads included in our current ब्रह्म विद्या program, namely ईशावास्य उपनिषत्, केनो उपनिषत्, कठोपनिषत्, तैत्तिरीय उपनिषत्, मुण्डक उपनिषत् and कैवल्य उपनिषत् will help enormously in gaining a fuller understanding of the entire message of the भगवत् गीता.

Among the six Upanishads mentioned above, कठोपनिषत् is particularly amenable to bringing the message of the भगवत् गीता into sharper focus, deeper appreciation and more relevance to the life of every person in the context of one's own life. It is for this reason, it is our own संप्रदाय – our own tradition, to teach कठोपनिषत्, calling attention to the relevant गीता verses as often as possible.

Every time one completes reading the entire भगवत् गीता together with the five Upanishads included in our ब्रह्म विद्या program, all with some degree of understanding and appreciation, one naturally experiences an extraordinary sense of spiritual strength, enlightenment and joy within. For these reasons, it is both proper and necessary to continue to call attention to the relevant Gita verses throughout our studies on कठोपनिषत्, and indeed every other Upanishad as well, as much as possible. Thus, in our current readings on कठोपनिषत्, we simply follow this tradition.